

NEW YORK TIMES
21 August 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

U.S. WILL PROCEED WITH AN ARMS TEST ON SPACE TARGET

SOVIET OBJECTION IGNORED

White House Aide, Telling of
Anti-Satellite Plan, Says,
'We Have to Test Now'

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Special to The New York Times

SANTA BARBARA, Calif., Aug. 20 — The White House announced today that, despite Soviet objections, the United States would proceed with the first American test of an anti-satellite weapon against an object in space.

Announcing the test, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said the system was needed as a deterrent because the Soviet Union already has the world's only operational anti-satellite system. Mr. Speakes also said there was a growing threat from existing and planned Soviet satellites.

"We have to test, and we have to test now," Mr. Speakes said. "They have one, and they don't want us to have one."

Keep Balance, McFarlane Says

In an interview, President Reagan's national security adviser, Robert C. McFarlane, said the test was needed to maintain the military balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

"This will lead to stability by having some equivalent capability," Mr. McFarlane said.

The Administration's announcement came in the form of notification to key members of Congress early today. Congress in 1983 legislation allowed the Air Force to conduct three such tests, but required at least 15 days' advance notice and a Presidential certification that the test would not interfere with negotiations on banning anti-satellite weapons.

Rocket Launch From Plane

Representative George E. Brown Jr., Democrat of California, a leading Congressional opponent of testing anti-satellite weapons, said the test would

make it harder to achieve a treaty limiting such weapons and would endanger existing limits on other weapons in space, such as antiballistic missiles.

Critics say that testing of anti-satellite weapons would erode the 1972 antiballistic missile treaty. While that treaty permits testing of weapons against satellites, the critics say the technology for shooting down missiles is so similar that the treaty could become meaningless.

In the test, a rocket is to be launched from an F-15 fighter plane high over the Pacific Ocean. The rocket, in turn, will fire a small homing vehicle to collide with the satellite in orbit.

The Air Force has conducted two tests aimed at blank points in space, and had originally planned its first test against an actual target in June. The test was postponed because of problems with the balloon-like target.

The Administration said the newly scheduled test firing would be conducted against an out-of-service American satellite.

The Air Force said the test date would be kept secret, in an attempt to complicate Soviet efforts to eavesdrop. Congressional aides predicted that the test would come soon after the 15-day notification period expires.

The Soviet Union has tested an anti-satellite weapon that is classified by the Pentagon as operational, although most experts agree it is much cruder and slower than the American one.

The Soviet system consists of a ballistic missile that is launched into orbit and then chases down enemy satellites. Experts say its last test, in June 1982, was a failure.

The Russians proposed a moratorium on the development of such defensive systems last June. The Administration countered by agreeing to discuss such a ban at the Geneva arms talks, where the issue has been on the agenda but has not been taken up, a senior Administration official said today.

Determination to Proceed

The announcement was made as Mr. Reagan left his ranch near here to attend private dinners and a fund-raising event in Los Angeles.

The one-page White House statement issued by Mr. Speakes to explain the decision said: "The Soviet Union has for many years had the world's only operational anti-satellite system. There is also a growing threat from present and prospective Soviet satellites which are designed to support directly the U.S.S.R.'s terrestrial forces.

"The United States must develop its own anti-satellite system capability in order to deter Soviet threats to United States and allied space systems and within limits imposed by international law, to deny any adversary advantages

arising from space-based systems which could undermine deterrence."

Russian System Described

Mr. Speakes and other United States officials said that the Russian system can "seek and destroy critical United States space systems" in orbits close to the earth.

In addition, he said, the Soviet Union maintains a large energy research program that involves ground-based lasers, which he said the United States believes can perform some anti-satellite destruction functions.

"We see this program as one that could result in the launch of the first prototype" of a space laser anti-satellite system in the late 1980's or the early 1990's, he said.

Mr. Speakes said the United States faces a "growing threat" from Soviet satellites that are designed to support Soviet forces in the event of a conflict. The satellites include those performing ocean reconnaissance that could target United States and allied fleets, and satellites with photographic and electronic capabilities that could support Soviet land-based troops, he said.

"These Soviet space-based assets constitute a clear threat to our national security and that of our allies," he said.

Soviet 'Disingenuous'

"In view of these Soviet activities, we think it is disingenuous for the Soviet Union to accuse the United States of militarizing space," he said. "The purpose of the United States system, and the reason we are testing, is to help maintain a deterrence in space and to deter threats to United States and allied systems."

Administration officials have said the development of the American system does not violate treaties with the Soviet Union. Making that assertion today, Mr. Speakes said the test was consistent with the obligations in the Outer Space Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Speakes said the Administration opposed a ban on such testing now because the Soviet Union, by calling for a ban, was seeking to freeze its advantage. He also said there would be a number of problems in working out such an agreement.

Mr. Speakes was asked whether the test could damage the summit meeting between President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, which is scheduled for Nov. 19-20 in Geneva. He answered, "There is no reason why this test should have any impact on that meeting."

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Soviet Said to Test in '82

Mr. Speakes said the Soviet anti-satellite system was tested in 1982. It was clear, he said, that the system could perform without frequent tests, which explained the Soviet Union's moratorium proposal.

The American anti-satellite program is "only in the development stage," he said, adding, "Our testing is necessary to restore the military balance."

Administration officials said the Soviet Union was told of the planned test early today through diplomatic channels before the public announcement. There was no immediate reaction, they said.

Mr. McFarlane said that the Administration plans to conduct such tests every four months and that the pace will be determined by technological advances, not by Congressional requirements.

Air Force Plans 10 Tests

The Air Force has scheduled 10 tests against objects in space. An Air Force

spokesman said that, after the test against a defunct satellite, the Air Force hopes to resume tests against target vehicles that are especially designed to report back on the accuracy of the system.

Mr. Brown, the California Congressman, and other critics say the Air Force has hinted that it is more interested in developing laser weapons for use against satellites, and that the weapon scheduled for testing may be scrapped as obsolete before it is ever deployed.

Mr. Speakes said the Administration was prepared to discuss limiting such systems at the Geneva arms talks if the Soviet Union was prepared to negotiate such an issue.